

## **New Year's diet resolutions: It's *not* about the food**

Another New Year's Day, another resolution to lose weight.

Another Feb. 1, another diet failure.

Studies show that eight out of every 10 people give up on their New Year's resolutions, most within the first month. And when it comes to dieting, it's no wonder resolve weakens. That's because most dieters focus on their tummies, not on their heads.

"Emotions, not appetite, rule when it comes to out of control eating," explains Lisa Howard of the Hungry Heart, a Seattle-area service that uses personal coaching, nutritional counseling and hypnotherapy for weight loss. "Especially for women, overeating masks feelings of anxiety, stress, loneliness or some other emotional need that is not being met. We turn to food for comfort."

How to stick to that resolution to eat healthier and drop some pounds? Stop dieting.

"I know it sounds counter-intuitive," Howard says. "But the first step is to get in touch with *why* we overeat and then free ourselves from the need to use food to feed our emotions instead of simply to nourish our bodies."

Here are a few first steps that Howard suggests for getting in touch with the "whys" of overeating:

- Keep a food diary, not just what you eat but what you're feeling. Ask yourself, "If I wasn't about to eat this, what would I be feeling?"
- Face those feelings and accept them. You have every right to feel exactly as you do. When we feel our feelings, process them and redirect our energy to think differently about the situation, the need to "eat over" our emotions disappears.
- Focus on other choices of things to do to comfort yourself – practice deep breathing, take a hot bath while listening to soft music, watch a screwball comedy.
- Listen to the negative voice inside your head that tells you, "You're fat. You're weak. You're worthless." And then shut it up! Would you ever speak to a friend that way? You cannot stop the cycle of overeating, dieting, failing and overeating again by being judgmental or berating yourself.
- If you do choose to eat, that's OK. But do so thoughtfully. Choose only first-rate food. Sit down at the table with no distractions. Savor the first two bites.

Once you get in touch with your emotions, you can begin to work smart food choices into your routine, Howard says. You can learn to eat when you're hungry, stop when you're full and trust yourself to eat healthfully without dieting.

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